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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an ongoing doctoral study on the preparation of teachers to work in a variety of student cultural populations. It will examine teachers from three distinctly different geographical and sociocultural areas. The three areas are urban, suburban/rural, and rural isolated school jurisdictions in Alberta and Saskatchewan (Canada). Data will be gathered in a series of structured and semi-structured interviews with a representative sample of teachers. The paper discusses the method to be used and describes an interest in the topic from observation of teachers working with aboriginal students in Canadian schools. These teachers apparently were finding it difficult to be effective educators to diverse urban populations. An overview looks briefly at current research and current teacher education practices. Later sections explore the significance of the research for theory, practice, and further research. The paper also contains working definitions of sociocultural contextualization, various culture groups, and other terms key to the project. The proposed study will address an area of research seldom explored: how the enlightened practices of teacher education that enable student teachers to become more reflective about their teaching (i.e., understand themselves and their commitments; develop habits of monitoring and improving their teaching) are helping teacher educators prepare to educate children in culturally diverse societies. Contains 27 references. (JB)

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THE CULTURAL PREPARATION OF TEACHERS

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Abstract

In this paper the issue of the cultural preparation of teachers is explored. The paper describes the background and rationale for a doctoral study being conducted by the author.

The study focuses on the problem of preparing teachers to work with a variety of student cultural populations. It involves the surveying of teachers from three distinct geographical and sociocultural areas, followed by a series of structured and semi-structured interviews with a representative sample of those teachers. The three areas to be surveyed are drawn from urban, suburban/rural, and rural/isolated school jurisdictions in Alberta and Saskatchewan. The general research problem to be addressed in the study is an exploration of the extent to which teachers are being prepared to be culturally effective educators in the classrooms of contemporary Canadian schools.

The Cultural Preparation of Teachers

In this paper I explore the issue of the cultural preparation of teachers. This includes the practicum and course component of the pre-service of teachers as well as the early experiences of teachers from an in-service perspective. Cultural preparation is not something which can be accomplished through a single course or workshop. Rather, it is an ongoing process which must continue throughout a teacher's professional life. This issue is also the focus of my doctoral research and, as such, I shall be drawing upon some of the literature I have reviewed as part of that research.

Introduction

My study addresses the question of whether teachers are properly prepared to work with a variety of student cultural populations. I am presently in the process of piloting the data gathering instruments for this study and, as such, this paper does not provide research findings. It does, however, allow me the opportunity to set the stage with respect to the purpose of the study, the methods I intend to use to perform the study, and the underlying logic and rationale for the study.

Method

The study will involve the surveying of teachers from three distinct geographical and sociocultural areas of Saskatchewan and Alberta, two provinces of western Canada. The three areas are urban, suburban/rural, and rural/isolated. The preliminary data collection will be through a questionnaire, developed by the author and distributed to a target ***n*** of 450 teachers drawn from schools within those areas. 150 teachers from each area will be invited to participate in the study. The initial data collection strategy will be followed by a series of structured and semi-structured interviews with a representative sample of those teachers.

There will be two rounds of interviews. The first round will consist of 30-36 telephone interviews which will serve to validate and confirm trends isolated from the responses to the questionnaire. The second round will be a series of approximately 6 in-depth interviews, conducted at the workplace of the participants. These interviews will provide a much deeper analysis and understanding of the issues identified from the literature, the preliminary data collection and analysis, and the subsequent confirmation of trends.

The general research problem to be addressed in the study is to explore the extent to which teachers are being prepared to be culturally effective educators in the classrooms of contemporary Canadian schools. I believe, and this opinion is supported by the little research that has been done in the field (e.g., Lockhart, 1991), that although the majority of teachers are white, middle class, and female, their students are not. It is unlikely that an appropriate number of minority culture teachers will be recruited into the profession over

the short term. As teacher educators, therefore, it behoves us to ensure that our majority culture teachers are provided with the most relevant preparation so that they may be successful in the culturally diverse classrooms of their chosen profession.

Background

My initial interest in this area of inquiry developed during my experiences with a number of First Nations schools in northern Canada. In these environments I observed some teachers floundering as they sought to work with children who were culturally different from themselves. Prior to their employment they had acquired an anthropological knowledge of First Nations which had given them a surface understanding of the cultural differences between one First Nation and another, usually from a historical context. They did not, however, appear to have acquired those attitudes, skills, and pedagogical knowledge which many educators have identified as being necessary for the effective teaching of Aboriginal students (e.g., Barnhardt, 1982; Kirkness, 1992; Kleinfeld, 1974; Philips, 1993).

On arriving in Edmonton I observed that the schools in which my daughters were enrolled had a high level of cultural diversity among the students. This diversity reflected the cultural pluralism of Canada and included children from many different cultural backgrounds. I wondered whether their teachers were finding it difficult to be equally effective educators to all members of such a culturally heterogeneous student population. Discussions with some of those teachers, together with comments made by students in an undergraduate course I taught for the Department of Educational Administration, indicated that this was indeed the case.

Overview

In Canada, the teachers in most public schools have all followed more or less the same teacher education programs. This is the case whether they subsequently teach in inner city, suburban, rural, or isolated schools, and indeed whether those schools have a culturally homogeneous or culturally diverse student population. These teacher education programs rarely appear to provide a focus on the sociocultural milieux in which teachers will function once they graduate from a teacher education program. Although the content, curriculum and general environments of Canadian teacher education programs reflect the majority culture (e.g., white, Anglo, middle class), this is not reflective of the cultural environment most teachers will experience in the majority of contemporary Canadian schools. The apparent cultural homogeneity of a small rural community, the visible cultural heterogeneity of an urban school, and the observed cultural differences between teachers and students in a First Nations school, are all issues related to the cultural preparation of teachers.

Recent reports concerned with the composition of the teaching force in both the United States (Grant & Secada, 1990) and Canada (Lockhart, 1991) have indicated that the majority of teachers are white, economically comfortable, middle class, and female. Their students, in contrast, display a more equitable gender division and are often non-white and from lower socioeconomic and social class backgrounds than their teachers. If Canadians are becoming more resistant to and less tolerant of recent immigrant minority groups, as recent public opinion polls would suggest (Canadians showing . . ., 1994), then the ability of teachers to sensitize students to issues of racism, stereotyping and multiculturalism are as important as their ability to function effectively with a variety of student cultural populations. This study will explore the extent to which teachers have been provided, through their teacher education programs and their experiences in the field, with a type of preparation which facilitates cultural effectiveness.

Wayne Gretsky has explained his on-ice successes by stating that he tries to go to where the puck will be, not to where it is at the moment. This concept underlies the proposed study. Roth (1992) has stated that "we must strengthen teacher education by employing the research base" (p. 6). I believe that there is a great deal of research which provides insight into culturally effective teaching practices, and that the cultural preparation of teachers will be an area of importance during the next decade. It is through the belief that this is where teacher education is going that I also believe we can determine the path we must take to arrive at that goal. My study will compare the research base on what <u>should</u>, according to a wealth of literature, constitute the cultural preparation of teachers with the teachers' perceptions of the cultural preparation they <u>actually</u> received as part of their teacher education process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the extent to which teachers are being prepared to be effective educators for the variety of student cultural populations found in contemporary Canadian schools and, if appropriate, to suggest ways in which that preparation might be further facilitated and enhanced.

Ducharme and Ducharme (1993), on assuming the joint editorship of the <u>Journal of Teacher Education</u>, began their first editorial by emphatically stating that

> Teacher education in the 1990s and beyond faces enormous challenges. . . . [The problems and issues include the] lack of racial and ethnic diversity among ourselves and in teacher education candidates compared with the tremendous diversity of the students they will teach in the coming decades. (p.2)

Following Katz and Raths (1992), one goal of this study is to pursue an "empirical examination of [one of] the dilemmas . . . identified as inherent in the education of

teachers" (p. 376). As Lawton (1987) has written, it is "necessary to locate educational change in the context of complex processes of technological, social and cultural changes, before describing the implications for teacher education" (p. 91). Education and schooling are activities which occur within a specific community context. This context is determined by the sociocultural, sociopolitical, socioeconomic and socioethnic influences of the community. Spindler (1987) has described this as a search for the "sociocultural contextualization of the educative process" (p. 70), a search which will be pursued throughout this study.

Significance

The study is significant in that it will address areas which have been identified, in the literature, as being of concern to both teachers and teacher educators. There have been few attempts to provide empirical support for these areas of concern, especially within a Canadian context. The study will examine the cultural preparation of teachers, broadly defined, and will take place within the sociocultural context of contemporary Canadian schools.

Theoretical Implications

This study will contribute to our knowledge of that aspect of the teaching continuum first queried by Sarason, Davidson, and Blatt (1986), namely that relationship which exists between the preparation of teachers and the realities they experience when they embark on their careers. Cazden and Mahan (1989) noted that "teachers and students [in the 1990s] will not share [the same] cultural and social experiences" (p. 54) and there is a need to address the educational needs of minority groups by sensitizing prospective teachers through the teacher education process. However Dianda (1991) found that many beginning teachers in California did not consider the cultural preparation they received during their pre-service programs to be effective in the real world.

The study will also make a contribution to the knowledge base by seeking to determine which, if any, of those strategies that have been reported in the literature as proving effective with culturally varied student populations are actually part of the preparation or practice of teachers. The findings of the study may have implications for the structure of teacher education programs and may also make recommendations with respect to the recruitment and initiation of beginning teachers.

Practical Implications

The study has practical significance in that the question of what might be done to enhance the quality of education by enhancing the quality of teachers and teacher education programs is one of great importance. Regan and Hannah (1993) noted that "there is a link between the philosophy and pedagogy of our [teacher education] program and the practice

of its graduates. . . . Their teacher preparation had a lasting impact" on their professional practice (p. 311). To improve the teacher preparation program is therefore one means of improving the practices of teachers in the classroom.

As far as more experienced teachers are concerned, such exposure to more effective practice may have a salutary effect. While recognizing Jackson and McKay's (1993) caveat that practices are seldom "abandoned simply on the basis of research findings" (p.2), it may be that another small piece of research will add to the weight of rationality so that an inappropriate practice, if not abandoned, might at least be amended to reflect the research findings. Failing this, the usage of more effective teaching practices by their younger colleagues may by example serve to overcome or amend those ineffective practices which remain in the repertoire of experienced teachers.

Implications for Research

One contribution of this study to the research will be an indication of the actual cultural diversity or heterogeneity to be found among the student population. Although a number of studies (e.g., Grossman, 1991; Leake, 1993; Roth, 1992) have discussed cultural heterogeneity in American schools, there have been few attempts to produce Canadian data. Such data is important if teachers are to be effectively prepared for the cultural diversity which is presumed to exist.

Avery and Walker (1993) have noted that "there is evidence that most teachers have limited knowledge about cultural and linguistic groups different from their own . . . and there is little indication that the predominantly white teaching force is prepared at either the preservice or inservice level to meet the needs of today's students" (p. 27). Corson (1993) has described the problems faced, in New Zealand, by "mainly monocultural teachers [who] were called upon to introduce the policy of *taha Maori* (things Maori) in schools" (p. 48). Razali (1992) recommended that sociolinguistic training be compulsory in all teacher preparation programs so as to increase teachers' awareness of the different needs of different groups of pupils. In order that effective cultural preparation occurs, however, there is a prerequisite that data is available to indicate the actual extent of cultural diversity in the schools. This study will contribute to the research base by providing some indication of this cultural diversity in contemporary Canadian schools.

Definitions

For the purposes of clarity, definitions drawn from the literature are provided for terms used in this study. A few of the more important are provided here.

Sociocultural Contextualization : The cultural homogeneity or heterogeneity of students in a class, and the relationship between the culture of those students and that of the teacher. Three distinct relationships have been identified :

Culturally similar relationship : A culturally homogeneous class is taught by a teacher who shares the same culture as those students.

Culturally different relationship : A culturally homogeneous class is taught by a teacher who does not share the same culture as those students.

Culturally diverse relationship : A culturally heterogeneous class is taught by a teacher who shares the same culture as some of the students but is culturally different from the majority of the students.

Majority Cultural Group : The ethnic group whose economic and political power is such that their cultural patterns are held to be the norm for the country as a whole.

Minority Cultural Groups : Those ethnic groups, other than the majority, who exist in the country. Ogbu (1993) has identified three subsets of minority cultural groups --

Domestic Minority : Those ethnic groups which, by virtue of conquest and/or colonization, have become a minority within their indigenous borders.

Immigrant Minority : Those ethnic groups which have chosen to leave their country of origin and establish themselves as a minority group in another country.

Autonomous Minority : Those groups which are ethnically similar to the majority cultural group but which have their own patterns of behavior and other cultural identification.

Teacher Education Programs (TEPs) : A formalized program of studies and practica which prepares selected candidates for a possible career in the teaching profession.

Other definitions are included, where appropriate, throughout the text.

Sociocultural Contextualization

Clune (1991) notes that "there has been an almost total failure of detailed design of how to deal with student [cultural] heterogeneity" (p. 131). Indeed, serious problems of policy implementation in schools arise simply because such policies are developed at the regional or provincial level and reflect a 'big picture' mentality which ignores local concerns. When implemented, however, successful policies must be "responsive to local context, influenced by embedded culture, both educational and social, and heavily impacted by race and socioeconomic status" (p. 126). Although a number of researchers have explored the nature of school culture and context, few have addressed what Corson (1991) describes as the task of helping schools become "more organic to [their] cultural community" (p. 7).

Katz and Raths (1992) discuss six dilemmas which they believe are inherent in teacher education. For one of these dilemmas, that of mastery versus emphasis (pp. 377-378), they note that "teacher educators are under constant pressure to expand the curriculum to cover more content and skills" (p. 33) and that this pressure includes issues related to multiculturalism. In recognizing that there is a literature on the cultural diversity facing

teachers, and that each cultural and ethnic group has different learning styles which require different teaching styles, the issue of how an empirical base to support the theoretical suggestions may be developed is one which should be addressed.

The theoretical knowledge about preparing teachers to be effective in a variety of cultural environments exists; it is now a matter of pursuing empirical research to confirm the theoretical base and to determine the existence of such activities in teacher preparation programs. This study will recognize the idiosyncratic nature of a teacher's experience and will attempt, as Zeichner (1983) recommended, to "go beyond each unique experience to develop generalizations which transcend the specific situations studied" (p. 34).

Summary

This paper has introduced a study concerned with the cultural preparation of teachers. The concept of sociocultural contextualization has been introduced and the research problems have been described. The significance of the study, and the definitions for some of the terms used in the study, are included in the paper.

I have demonstrated that there is a literature on the variety of student cultural groups facing teachers in their classrooms, and that each cultural and ethnic group has different learning styles which require different teaching styles. The study has been further brought into focus by the comments of Zeichner (1992), who writes that :

> In the last few years the teacher education literature has emphasized the importance of helping student teachers become more reflective about their teaching in the practicum, of preparing supervisors to foster reflective teaching, and of methods like story telling, journal writing, and action research. We are doing a much better job of enabling student teachers to understand themselves and their commitments and to develop habits of monitoring and improving their teaching. Still, little has been written about how this enlightened practice is helping us to prepare teachers to educate children in culturally diverse and democratic societies. . . . If teachers are not educated to teach children of any social origin and background, then teacher educators are failing. (p. 302)

The study will address an area of research which has seldom been explored and, as a result, may produce findings which have theoretical, practical, and research implications for teacher preparation programs and for the ongoing professional development of teachers.

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